

Poison 6 - Hell Hath No Fury

by ginny29

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Summary: Summer AC 194. A mission in the desert prompts Treize to a personal decision he hopes will stabilise his relationship with Zechs. But when he's forced to make another as the younger man's Commander, will it pull them apart forever?

1. Chapter 1

Treize sighed wearily as he closed the glass door to his shower cubicle and stepped under the powerful spray, tilting his head back to allow the water to soak into his hair and massage his scalp. With a bit of luck, the gentle thrum of the water on his skin would be enough to ease away the headache that had been throbbing behind his eyes on and off for the last few days.

As his body relaxed in the hot spray and the clouds of steam, Treize let his mind wander where it wanted to, shutting down the ruthless hold he'd kept on himself whilst he tackled the latest crisis. He wasn't particularly surprised to find that his mind wanted to consider Zechs, and with another soft exhalation, he gave in, knowing he couldn't put it off forever.

Learning from Jean-Michel Rena just what Zechs had unwittingly committed the Specials to take part in had infuriated Treize, and he had turned the force of that anger onto the younger man, unable to comprehend how he could have been so careless. Surely Noventa's games were obvious?

In trying to explain to the pilot what had happened, though, Treize had realised that, just perhaps, they weren't. Zechs had been utterly clueless as to what he'd done, and the dawning horror in his beautiful eyes as the general made a point of telling him in the cruellest fashion he could come up with had been painful to watch. Zechs genuinely hadn't known how those vultures had used him.

With hindsight, Treize could admit that it hadn't been at all fair of

him to expect that the younger man would be able to stand up to Noventa and his cronies. The pilot was barely eighteen years old, and had a self-admitted lack of interest and ability in politics. Zechs had none of the older man's natural aptitude for shell games, and the rigorous training Treize himself had received at the hands of his family Zechs had never had. In conjunction with the distraction his understandable concern for his lover had caused, the blond had been easy prey for a pack of wily old wolves.

Treize had drawn these conclusions as his temper cooled and had found himself ashamed of the way that he'd treated his lover. He'd asked far too much of the younger man and then had turned on him when he couldn't deliver to perfection. Given everything that had been working against him, Zechs had actually done a better job than could have reasonably been asked.

Thinking back over the nasty little scene in his London office, Treize shivered despite the heat of the water. Angry or not, some of the things he'd said to Zechs that evening were far beyond the point of decency â€" it was no surprise at all that pilot didn't appear to want anything to do with his commander anymore.

Swamped with his efforts at damage control, stressed beyond bearing and exhausted by the strain, Treize had all but ignored Zechs for the remainder of their time in London. He'd watched from a distance as the younger man gradually lost the sparkle that seemed to light him, without knowing what to say or do to fix things and without the opportunity to try. He'd wanted to go to the pilot, to apologise and attempt to make things better, to make Zechs understand that he hadn't done anything wrong after all, but before Treize got the chance Zechs was gone, returning to his command in Egypt in the early hours of the morning without ever telling Treize that he was going.

The unspoken message was clear to the older man â€" Zechs wanted nothing more to do with him â€" but then he'd never been one to do as he was told.

The move back to Luxembourg, when it came, had been a blessed relief to everyone involved, and now, three weeks later, Zechs had flown in to deliver his periodic progress report and to take care of some other basic administrative nonsense. The younger man didn't know it yet, but Treize had arranged to take that report himself, forcing the pilot to be in the room with him, to talk with him.

If Treize had his way, they wouldn't be talking about duty for long.

Stepping from the spray a little, Treize reached out for his shampoo, poured a small amount into his hands and began to work it through his hair, pressing his fingers into his scalp rhythmically. It was such a pleasant feeling to be able to do this properly again.

Over two months of not being able to use his left hand had left Treize with a new appreciation of how capable his body usually was. Simple tasks had been difficult, if not impossible, and one of the things he had missed most was the ability to wash his hair as thoroughly as he usually did. For a man concerned with his personal grooming to the point of obsession, having his hair less than perfectly clean was annoying in the extreme.

The week he'd spent in the hospital following the injury had been the most trying, overall. A civilian facility to begin with, the hospital had been swamped by the number of casualties they'd received from the base, and out of their depth with the nature of the injuries those casualties were suffering from. The staff, even with the support of the Specials medical unit that had flown in, was stretched to their limit and even for a patient of Treize's rank they didn't have time to do more than was necessary. Though Treize couldn't fault the care they'd taken of him or any of his troops, he could wish wholeheartedly that he'd been allowed to wash a shade more often than he had.

Once installed in his London house, the general had found that Zechs was only too willing to assist him with his bathing, whether that meant simply hovering around to pass the older man things as he needed them, or going as far as getting in the bath with Treize to hold him whilst the heat of the water soaked out some of the pain he was experiencing.

After their argument, though, with Zechs gone back to Egypt, Treize had been forced to manage alone and he was only grateful that he had already healed well enough to make the switch to the much less cumbersome, waterproof brace.

Glancing at his left arm as he reached next for his soap, Treize allowed a rueful little smile to touch his lips. A fortnight ago, his doctors had allowed him to switch the support for his arm again, and this latest, and hopefully last, of the three devices was also the most tolerable of the lot. Light and almost comfortable, it was little more than a reinforced sleeve kept in place by adjustable straps. Treize's physiotherapist had actually admitted in the session the general had just come from that he was being made to wear it more as a way to remind him not to stress his arm too much than out of actual necessity.

It would be a surprise for Zechs, at least, to see his commander seemingly recovered. Although the blond would certainly learn the truth if Treize got his way, until the general removed his shirt the new brace was undetectable, perfectly concealed by his heavy uniform.

Treize realised suddenly that his hands, prompted by thoughts of the younger man, were lingering on his body more than washing it, adding tiny flares of physical pleasure to the tension his mind was creating in him. Despite one or two occasions of rather creative thinking on their parts, there had been almost two months were Treize had been able to touch his love properly, and combined with a nearly a month of not seeing Zechs at all, with the uncertainty of their relationship casting a pall over his mind, it was enough to leave the older man more than a little eager for what he had planned for the evening.

Treize hesitated for a moment, taking a deep breath as he let himself sink into the light haze of pleasure he was feeling, wondering whether or not to let it go any further. An admitted hedonist, he was normally the last person to advocate self-restraint over something as trivial as masturbation, but on this occasion, with his plans for the evening firmly in his mind, he let himself drift for a few seconds and then forced himself to turn off the shower and go about the

business of drying off and getting dressed, suppressing the urge ruthlessly. Practiced as he was in making himself feel good, there was no comparison between that and what he felt when he was with Zechs.

His body humming pleasantly, the headache banished completely, Treize slipped into his uniform and made his way to his office to wait for the younger man.

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On the far side of the base, Zechs forced his face into stillness as he stepped down from the plane that had brought him in from Egypt and came face to face almost immediately with Lady Une.

Wondering what she was doing here, he sincerely hoped it wasn't more than her customary greeting to an incoming officer. If it turned out that he was supposed to deliver his update to her, the pilot thought he might be forced to scream. Une wasn't the easiest of superiors on a good day but after a month of frontline action and a five-hour flight she would be intolerable. And that was if she'd recovered from her amazing bitching streak in London.

He saluted her neatly as his feet touched the solid concrete of the hanger floor. "Lady Une?"

"Major Marquise, welcome back to Luxembourg. I trust the flight was comfortable?"

"Perfectly, Lady, thank you," Zechs agreed, responding to the empty pleasantries in like fashion. He extended a hand as Une offered him the small paper wallet that contained the details of his stay at HQ.

"Your room assignment and schedule until you return to your squadron, Major," she told him unnecessarily.

"Thank you again. You wouldn't happen to know when the first debriefing is scheduled, by any chance?" he asked, praying for it to be in the morning so he could fall into bed and sleep for twelve hours before he had to have his wits about him.

"19:00 this evening, Major. I assume that won't be a problem?"

"No, of course not," Zechs agreed, but he groaned internally. Had Une done it deliberately? He was well aware that scheduling debriefings was her responsibility, and he wouldn't have put it past her to try to catch him out by not giving him chance to rest first. If she had done it on purpose, where had she found a Staff officer willing to work after dinner to take a Major's routine report? Unless Une was taking his report herselfâ€¦

"Lady, forgive me, but would you know which officer is conducting the debriefing?"

Behind her glasses, Une's eyes flicked to the envelope she'd given

the pilot, as much as saying 'look it up for yourself!' but she merely smiled tightly as she answered, "Mr. Treize, I believe. He insisted."

"Ah. Thank you."

"You're welcome. Any other questions?" Une asked, but didn't give him time to reply before she carried on, "No? I assume you remember your way around then? Good."

Zechs watched in wry amusement as she turned on her boot heel and stalked away.

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A glance at his wristwatch when Lady Une disappeared from his sight had been enough to jolt Zechs into action. He had just a little more than an hour before he had to report for his debriefing and if he couldn't have the night's rest he'd been hoping for, then he at least needed a long shower, a pot of coffee to try to wake himself up and a chance to look over his notes again. With luck, Treize would keep it short and wouldn't ask too many awkward questions.

Flicking open the envelope he was holding in his hands, Zechs scanned the first page until he found the room he had been assigned and began making his way there with a swift stride. He found the room rather easily and unlocked it with the code printed next to the room number. Pausing only briefly to look around before dumping his duffle onto the neatly made bunk, Zechs headed into the bathroom to turn on the shower.

With the water warming, he made his way back into the main room and found the coffee machine, setting it to brew as he pulled his uniform off and dug into his bag enough to find the case he'd packed his toiletries in.

Half an hour soaking in the shower left Zechs feeling something close to human again, and he dried his hair with practiced ease before sitting down on the edge of his bunk with his coffee to read.

After the first quick glance through of his notes, though, he couldn't make himself concentrate any more and he sighed as he tossed the file aside and flopped back onto the pillows. In his mind he could hear Lady Une's voice replaying over and over again, '_Mr. Treize, I believe. He insisted.' _and he shook his head a little, trying to banish the emotions her words had called up.

If there had been one officer he wanted to take his report even less than Une herself, it was Treize. The unrelenting nature of his duties for the past month had left Zechs with very little time to think about what had happened between the two of them "something he'd been grateful for at the time" but now it meant that his own feelings on the subject were no more resolved than they had been in London. Despite Noin's assurances to the contrary, it seemed as though Treize could and did hold Zechs responsible for what had happened. In the week following the argument in Treize's office, the

general had barely spoken to the pilot and he'd made no effort at all to contact Zechs during his time in Egypt.

From a man who, two months before, hadn't been able to go 24 hours without at least an email back and forth, Treize's silence was an effective way of making sure Zechs knew how things stood between them. Clearly, Treize wasn't about to tolerate someone as useless as the pilot had proven himself to be as his lover. It was still up for debate whether there was anything of their friendship to be salvaged.

Seeing Treize hadn't been on Zechs's list of tasks to be accomplished in this brief stay at headquarters. In fact, it had been his sincere intention to avoid the older man altogether so that Treize wouldn't be able to confirm everything Zechs was suspecting. However self-deluding it might be, the pilot wanted desperately to hold onto that last shred of hope he had that he hadn't ruined things completely. Hearing Treize tell him things were over would tear that away.

It appeared, though, that the general had other plans and Zechs supposed he shouldn't be too surprised â€" Treize had never been one to shirk away from a task that had to be faced.

It remained only to be seen whether Zechs could hang on to his composure long enough to get through this meeting without making a total fool of himself.

The beep of the reminder he had set on his watch forced him to pull away from his thoughts and he began to dress methodically, taking the time to make sure his appearance was as close to perfect as he could get it.

Zechs hesitated for a full fifteen seconds before he knocked on Treize's office door, waiting for the second hand on his watch to tick down so that he would be precisely on time. His rap was answered almost immediately by that so-familiar voice bidding him to come in and Zechs obeyed, taking a deep breath meant to calm his nerves and feeling suddenly grateful for the mask hiding most of his expression.

Treize was sitting behind his desk, the chair half turned away so that he could tilt his head to look out of the window, balancing a cup and saucer between his hands. Zechs was both surprised and relieved to see that his friend seemed to have the full use of his left arm back, with no sign of any support or restraint to be seen.

He drew himself to attention as Treize turned the chair and set the cup down on the desk. For a moment, his sharp, stern expression made his eyes hard as he scanned over the younger man, and then the general came to his feet, smiling affectionately and his gaze gentled. "Hello, Zechs," he greeted quietly.

"Sir," the pilot returned formally, wondering what was happening. The warmth of Treize's tone was surprising, not at all what Zechs had been expecting and he couldn't help but feel the first edges of panic as he tried to work out why the older man would behave this way. "I have my report for you, sir, if youâ€"?"

"Yes, of course. Do put it on my desk â€" I'll read it later." Treize waited until the younger man's move to obey put them level, then he reached out and brushed his fingers across one red sleeve, feeling the heat from the other man's body even through the heavy fabric. "How have you been, Zechs? You didn't write to meâ€".

The fleeting touch and the almost wistful tone of Treize's question made Zechs freeze, his head snapping round so he could look at his commander. "I didn't imagine you wanted me to, sir and I had no wish to make a nuisance of myself."

The soft smile touched Treize's mouth again. "Zechsâ€" he chided gently. "How could you ever be a nuisance? Of course I wanted you to. Don't I always?"

"Yes, butâ€". I didn't think you were talking to me, sir. You made it rather clear in London that you didn't want to see me."

"By asking you to leave me alone after the meeting? I am sorry about that but I rather needed the space for a few hours. Losing my temper like that was quite embarrassing enough without you seeing it. I didn't mean for you to avoid me altogether."

Zechs frowned, beyond confused. This really wasn't the conversation he'd been expecting to have. "No, sirâ€" I know that," he admitted, "but itâ€". Well, it looked as though you were avoiding me."

"I was busy, Zechs. Nothing more."

"I'm sorry, sir. It didn't look that way." Zechs stopped, caught his breath and spoke without thinking. "Treize, if that's really all that was going on, why didn't _you_ write to _me_?!"

To Zechs's surprise colour touched the older man's face.

"Ah," Treize murmured, "you see, I rather thought it was you that didn't want anything more to do with me. I didn't want to seemâ€" pushy, I suppose. I hoped that if I let you be for a while that you mightâ€" forgive me."

"Forgive you? For what? I thought I was the one whoâ€".

Treize shook his head. "For the way I spoke to you in my office." The general let the words linger for a moment or two, and then, seeing that Zechs didn't understand, he sighed. "Zechs, sit down. And take that damned mask off."

The pilot began to obey without thinking, and then stopped himself, realising that he had almost slipped back into the habits that had formed so naturally in the months since his relationship with Treize had changed. In the weeks leading up to the Dover bombing, almost every evening the two men had spent together had started in Treize's office, with Zechs complying with those same two instructions as the older man moved to pour them both a drink much as he was now.

"Sir â€" this is meant to be a debriefingâ€".

Treize turned his head at Zechs's words, wondering at the mixed tones of confusion and chastisement in the pilot's voice. "I'm aware of that," the general replied, before hesitating briefly and smiling ruefully at himself. "So much for my grand strategy," he quipped. "Shall I confess that I forced the Lady to assign me this debriefing? And that I made her schedule it out of hours?"

"I knew you'd insisted upon taking the debriefing" Lady Une told me so "but I thought she'd picked the time to spite me. I haven't been off the plane more than an hour and I would have preferred to do this in the morning."

"Ah. You should blame me for the poor timing, not the Lady. I insisted and I apologise if it's causing you problems."

Zechs shook his head. "Not problems, precisely, sir. It's not important."

The older man tilted his head, analysing. "I'm sorry," he murmured after a moment or two. "You're jet lagged and I should have realised you would be. I was going to offer you a glass of wine but would you rather have coffee?"

"Actually, water. If you have it," Zechs added quickly. "I've already tried coffee and I think alcohol would just about knock me out," he explained.

"I have tonic water, if that will do?" Treize asked, waited for Zechs to nod and went to the familiar cabinet. "Sit down, will you? It's giving me neck ache looking up at you! And take off that mask!"

Surprised into chuckling, Zechs dropped down onto the couch, removing the helmet with a little sigh of relief and watched as Treize fussed with bottles and glasses.

"If we were in my rooms I could ice this for you, but alas" the general teased as he handed one of the glasses to the blond and sat down next to him.

"This is fine, sir."

"Well, rather you than me, but each to their own."

Zechs didn't reply other than to take a sip from the glass and then scowl slightly. "You said something about a strategy, sir?"

Treize smiled. "I did, yes. Not one of my better plans it appears. You're here under rather false pretences, I'm afraid. It's not very professional of me," he admitted, "but I scheduled this meeting deliberately to force you to talk to me. I never had intention of discussing Egypt with you. It would be more than a little pointless anyway."

Zechs fixed his gaze on the floor. "I thought that might be the case, sir. Before we talk about other things could I have ten minutes to discuss Egypt with you, please? It wouldn't be pointless. I don't think you realise how bad things are there and"

"You can have as long as you like if you feel the need, Zechs. You

should know that."

"Thank you, sir. I wouldn't insist butâ€¦." Zechs swallowed hard. "I'm sorry to have to tell you this, sir. I know it's not what you want to hear but, quite honestly, I need help and I don't think I can afford to wait until the next debriefing to ask for it."

Treize, in the middle of leaning back against his desk, paused and stood straight again. "Oh? What makes you say that? From what I can gather you're doing a more than commendable job."

"I'm not, sir," Zechs denied, wondering what on Earth had given Treize that impression. "Before I left for Dover, sir, we were making some progress in expanding the border. Admittedly, it was slow going, but stillâ€¦." He frowned. "Sometime in the months I was away the Arab Independent States have found a troop strength we never expected they could have. They're using mobile suits of a type we've never seen before and our Leo's just aren't up to it. They aren't strong enough to counter the A.I.S.'s numerical superiority. We're holding the line for now, butâ€¦."

"But not for much longer. I know, Zechs, I have been reading your reports. I didn't mean to sound as though I was dismissing your concerns for your command by saying that your debriefing wasn't necessary." Treize smiled sympathetically, and then allowed the expression to tighten a little as something occurred to him. "Why is it that you think you need help? I realise it must be an exhausting post but you've seemed to be doing quite well. Is it too much for you? Should I find a replacement for you and bring you back here?"

Zechs's head snapped up. "What? No, of course not! I didn't say the post was too much for me!"

Treize raised an eyebrow, forcing the smile down so that it was internal only. "Yes, you did. You've just told me you need help."

"I do. I can't hold the line without more troops. I know you trusted me toâ€¦ butâ€¦."

"Ah, I see. You meant to say that your squadron needs help. That your squadron is under-strength for the task assigned to it. Not that you, personally, couldn't cope."

"Forgive me, sir, butâ€¦ that's what I just said!" Zechs spluttered, wondering what the hell Treize was drinking to have this effect on him.

The general shook his head. "No, love, it really isn't," he said softly.

"Surely you knew what I meant?" Zechs demanded. "Or do you not trust me at all anymore?" he added quietly.

"I trust you absolutely," Treize confirmed. "And, yes, I knew what you meant. Consider this your first lesson in politics â€" semantics can be critically important, as we've just seen. What you intended to say and what you actually said were two completely different things. No politician who wants to survive ever lies directly but we're all very good at linguistic misdirection." The general waited a breath or

two. "As you discovered with Noventa, I think."

Zechs tensed. "I don't think he had to be very good. I was just too stupid to realise what he was doing."

Treize snorted and shook his head. "Too inexperienced, yes, perhaps. You've never been stupid, Zechs. May we come back to this?"

The pilot nodded mutely, wishing with everything that he was that the subject of the Horse Guards meeting never had to be raised again.

Treize took a sip of his drink and looked at the younger man inquisitively, noting the sudden misery in every line of the blonde's body. The older man had to cringe a little at the thought that his own behaviour was at least partly responsible. "As I said," he began, forcing his mind away from that idea. "Your debriefing was mostly unnecessary. I have been reading your reports and I agree with your assessment of the situation. Your squadron won't be able to hold the line for very much longer."

"Then, you'll give me the reinforcements I need?"

"Notâ€¦ precisely," Treize corrected. "When you go back at the end of the week, I'm coming with you."

"Excuse me?" Zechs asked, confused. "You'reâ€¦?"

"I'm coming with you," Treize repeated. "Along with about half of our fighting strength. Your squadron will be retired from the theatre, stood down for three weeks and then sent to China."

"What?!"

"Hush," Treize interrupted. "You've been reassigned. I have a job I need you for, if you think you can stand to stay in Egypt?"

"If you want me to."

"That's good. I would hate to have to lose you when you're doing so well. You're proving to be a brilliant commander. I doubt I could find anyone else who could have held out even this long."

"I can't complete the task you assigned me and you say I'm doing well? I'd love to know how you work that out," Zechs murmured, his tone bitter. "I think you would have been better to leave me as a Captain. I don't think I'm suited to higher command."

"Such a shame that I disagree with you, then, isn't it? Or would that be fortunate for your career?" Treize got to his feet, pacing restlessly. "Twice in recent months I've asked you to take on tasks beyond the scope of your rank and your experience. Both times you've performed to your absolute best, and well beyond anything I should ever have expected of you. If you haven't succeeded in completing those tasks as they were written, the fault doesn't lie with you."

Zechs was watching the older man with something twisting in his eyes that Treize wasn't sure he wanted to understand. If the general

hadn't known how ill he'd used the pilot already, he would have had clear evidence of it now " and it was no wonder that Noin had seemed to be gritting her teeth every time she'd spoken to him. She must be absolutely furious but it wasn't done to read one's Commander-in Chief a riot act.

"I thought it did," Zechs replied eventually. "And you certainly appeared to think it did last time."

"Yes, I did, and I was wrong to." Treize sighed and came to stand in front of Zechs, looking down levelly. "I can only ask you to forgive me for that."

"What am I supposed to be forgiving you for, Treize?" the younger man suddenly demanded, dropping the façade of formality he'd kept up so far. "Pointing out what I'd allowed to happen? I'm furious with myself, so I can hardly blame you for being angry with me!"

"I'm not angry with you. Myself, perhaps. Noventa and Septum, certainly. Whichever fools on L5 thought all this was good idea in the first place, but not you."

"But you should be!" Zechs insisted. "I did exactly what you'd told me not to. I let them use me and my concern for you to get their own way! I didn't listen to you when you warned me what sort of people they were and it nearly meant the deaths of all those colonists! If you hadn't stopped it!"

"Which I did. But Zechs, I never should have put you in that position in the first place. It was completely unreasonable of me to expect you to be able to stand up to Noventa!" Treize shook his head tiredly. "The man's a master politician. He's been manipulating people for almost fifty years. Ventei's the same and everyone else in that room was a pawn. They were all following a well-rehearsed script, and you didn't even have the title of the play. All things considered, you did remarkably well!"

"You didn't think that in London."

The flat, lifeless tone of Zechs's voice communicated nothing and everything to Treize about how the pilot was feeling. That the other officer was still upset and angered by their argument was obvious, but there was nothing to tell the general where in the wide range of possible emotions Zechs was falling at the moment. "I'm not particularly convinced that I was thinking, so much as reacting," Treize replied quietly. "It's no real excuse but I wasn't at my best and I'm afraid I let it get to me more than I should have. I'm aware that my behaviour was unacceptable both on a professional level and on a personal one, and that I said things you would be within your rights to be utterly infuriated with me for. I used things about you that I was told in confidence and that I knew would wound in a way I never should have."

Zechs was looking up at the older man steadily and he gave a half-hearted little shrug as Treize dropped into an expectant silence, completely lost for what to say. The general's almost dispassionate recitation was unsettling in a strange way.

Treize waited a moment or two and then dropped his eyes away from Zechs's to focus on the empty glass he still had in his hand. "As

I've said," he murmured, "I can only ask you to forgive me. Only you can decide whether you can or not." The general matched Zechs's little shrug as he turned away slightly. "If you can't, then I accept that. Allow me to say good night to you now and I'll meet you at breakfast tomorrow morning to begin preparations for Egypt."

"And if I can?" Zechs asked, voice soft, knowing there was no real question about it.

Treize looked around sharply, his blue eyes flashing a little. "Then, Iâ€¦" He stopped, shrugged again and smiled apologetically. "I don't know," he admitted. "I had it all planned but none of that seems important. Stay with me?" he asked.

The younger man had to smile at the touch of uncertainty in that question. Treize this off-balance and unsure of things was a rarity. It was a slightly unkind part of Zechs that found pleasure in seeing it but it was a pleasure nonetheless. "If you'd like me to," he replied.

"I'd like you to. I've missed you." The general turned back to face his pilot fully and smiled again.

"I can say the same about you," Zechs confessed, standing up so he could close the space between the two of them. "I honestly thought you'd arranged to see me so you could tell me you wanted nothing else to do with me."

"Silly of you."

"Possibly," Zechs agreed. "Are we staying here, orâ€¦?"

"I have no ideaâ€¦."

Zechs chuckled softly, wondering how long it would be before one or the other of them moved. The heat and the want in Treize's eyes were only a match for those in his own, the pilot knew, yet the two of them were standing barely inches apart, gazing at each other fixedly and without either of them making any attempt to touch the other.

The younger officer reached out with one hand just as the general let his weight shift. It was enough that Zechs could catch hold of Treize and pull the older man against him, closing the gap between them.

"Mein Gott," Treize breathed, letting his forehead rest on Zechs's shoulder as his arms slipped around the pilot's waist. He sighed and it sounded almost shaky to the younger man.

"Treize?"

"Did you change your cologne?" Treize asked quietly and his breath was warm and slightly damp on the skin above the pilot's collar. "I don't think I recognise this one."

"You wouldn't. It's something Noin sent to me from L4. Do you like it?"

"It could grow on me, I suppose. It's certainly nothing like the

other one," Treize noted, inhaling again slowly, familiarising himself with this new facet to the scent he identified with the younger man. The heavy smoky perfume Zechs's classmate had chosen for him was a far cry from the light, citrusy cologne's the blond seemed to lean toward himself.

"No, but I think I was tired of that one anyway," Zechs replied.

Treize nodded, deciding he liked the new scent, at least at the moment. Whatever else it was, it was certainly more seductive than the old one.

"Why are we talking about my new cologne?" Zechs asked and Treize shook his head.

"I have no idea," he murmured, brushing his lips across the soft skin of Zechs's throat.

"Oh!" the blond gasped. "Do that again, will you?"

Treize hummed an agreement, doing as he was asked and then lifting his head when Zechs's fingers caught in the neatly trimmed strands of hair at the older man's collar and tugged gently. The unspoken request was hardly difficult to understand and the general leaned in, having to tilt his head back a little as well as to one side as his mouth met Zechs's and lingered.

The kiss deepened quickly, the chaste pressure melting into the taste of the other man, layered flavours of mint tooth care products, smoky Cognac and bitter tonic water tinted with the ginger extract Treize had flavoured it with. The general's hands were tangled in Zechs's hair, petting the silky lengths as slowly as the pilot's own fingers were stroking over the clothing wrapped like muscle of Treize's back, digging a little when they hit the occasional point of tension.

This type of kissing â€" Treize had distinctly different ways of going about it, Zechs had learned, depending on the mood he was in â€" was a familiar cue to their bodies. Though this kiss stayed lazy where others had quickly gotten rushed and a touch desperate, the rising need eventually forced Zechs to pull his mouth away from the general's.

"Treize, here orâ€¦?" he asked again, when he'd got enough breath.

The older man shrugged, panting. "I don't know," he gasped. "When I asked you to stay I didn't mean you had to come to bed with me."

"I don't care what you meant. Answer me. Here, your rooms or mine?"

Treize just shook his head. "You decideâ€¦".

Zechs blinked. "What was in that Cognac?" he teased. "This is most unlike you."

"Is it?" Treize's expression was determinedly unconcerned. "I don't care."

"All right. Your rooms then. They're more secure and the bed's bigger. Come on."

Treize nodded, turning away from the younger man and freeing himself from the hold Zechs still had on him. "Sound enough reasoning, I suppose."

"I thought so." Zechs turned to head to the door and Treize stopped him with a touch.

"A moment, if you will. We're both a little rumpled â€" it wouldn't do for anyone to see us like this."

"Probably not. Not that anyone's likely to hit on the truth, but none of the reasons people could decide upon for our state would do our reputations any good," Zechs agreed.

A few seconds spent straightening ornate uniforms and smoothing mussed hair back into place left the two men looking almost as pristine as they normally did, and finally Treize pronounced himself satisfied that they'd pass inspection. "As long as we don't dawdle," he added.

"I don't think there's any danger of that, Treize," Zechs replied dryly.

The general smirked as he opened his door. "Oh, admittedly. But one never knows what will happen next. Une could be lurking just around the corner for all we know. She's been impossible enough recently without her seeing this. Lord alone knows what she'd slip into my coffee tomorrow morning!"

"Short of a love potion, nothing," Zechs snorted.

The older man shot the pilot a slightly rueful glance and shrugged. "Your coffee, then. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned and all that. You aren't her favourite person at the moment, I'm afraid."

Both men absently returned the salute of the guard at the end of the corridor and turned, as in step as if they'd been on a parade field, to make their way down the flight of stairs that would take them to the sweeping lobby of the building. It was a walk they had made together dozens of times but, somehow, the tension in the air made it unfamiliar. The anticipation between them was palpable, reflected in the little glances they kept throwing one another and the casual, seemingly accidental way Treize kept brushing against Zechs as they walked.

"I'm never Une's favourite person, Treize," Zechs pointed out as they turned from the bustle of the lobby out into the courtyard.

"I know." Treize shook his head. "Can we discuss the Lady another time, please? Thoughts of her don't really go with my current mood."

Zechs smirked. "I'm glad to hear it." He turned automatically for the door that would take them into the Staff Officers Block and stopped in surprise when Treize didn't turn with him. "Where are you going?"

he asked as the older man carried on walking.

Treize stopped, looked back over his shoulder and gestured imperiously for Zechs to rejoin him. "That's right, you won't know," he murmured when the blond was back at his shoulder. "I should have told you this earlier, probably, but I don't have rooms on the base anymore."

Zechs blinked. "You don't?"

"No. Working from home in London inspired me, so I bought a house."

"Youâ€¦ bought a house?" the pilot quizzed, taken a little aback. "You hardly need another one," he quipped. Zechs was used to Treize doing things that surprised him, but this was on a slightly different scale than he was used to.

Treize gestured with a hand, dismissing that comment, and let an impish little smile touch his lips. "I do seem to have a surfeit, I have to agree. But although the Lady agreed that my staying off base when I wasn't working would be safer, she also agreed that an hour's flight to get here each morning would prove problematic. Since that counted out the Paris apartments and I don't own anything closer I had little choice but to find somewhere new."

"Oh. Is that where we're going then?"

"If you don't mind. It needs some work still â€" some of the modifications I have planned are quite drastic â€" but the residential areas are already finished and my rooms are quite wonderfully comfortable."

Zechs shrugged. "You'll have to allow me time to sign out of the base, but of course I don't mind."

Treize smiled. "I've already taken care of that â€" Une marked you down originally as being seconded to my command for the duration of your stay so you will be assumed to be wherever I am." The general watched what he could see of Zechs's face beneath the mask he had replaced before leaving his commander's office, waiting for the surprise that showed to fade away before he spoke again. "And, I'm glad you don't mind. The house really is far more comfortable, and definitely more private. Always a good thing, wouldn't you agree?"

Zechs appeared to still for moment, then he nodded. "Alwaysâ€¦"

End
file.